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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1837
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3573
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0534
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7065
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4681
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2900
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0557
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 001571

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: GOB DEFENDS ITS GUIDELINES ON HUMANITARIAN AID

REF: A. RANGOON 1528

[1](#)B. RANGOON 171

Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: GAO Senior Analysts met with Burmese government officials during their 10-day visit to discuss the GOB's new guidelines for humanitarian assistance issued last February. The guidelines have caused confusion and apprehension in the IO/INGO/NGO community. The Director General of the Ministry of Planning, designated by the GOB to take the lead in handling humanitarian aid issues, defended the guidelines as a better way to coordinate and implement international assistance. The GOB acknowledged that their guidelines target the UN's civil society and capacity-building activities. Health providers receive less pressure. The DG stated that INGOs need to stay out of politics if they want to help the Burmese people. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) On October 19, GAO Senior Analysts traveled to the Burmese capital of Nay Pyi Taw with Pol/Econ chief to meet officials from the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development and the Ministry of Health (MOH). GAO requested the meeting to discuss with GOB officials the new guidelines for humanitarian assistance that the regime issued to the UN, INGOs, and NGOs last February.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Director General Daw Myo Nwe from the Foreign Economic Relations Department at the Ministry of Planning took charge of the meeting. She began by explaining to the GAO team that the Ministry of Planning had issued the new guidelines to ensure humanitarian assistance in Burma was more coordinated and implemented more smoothly. She emphasized that the GOB wanted humanitarian assistance in Burma to be as effective as possible. The Guidelines, Daw Myo Nwe said, were designed to support INGOs and NGOs, and not hinder the implementation of humanitarian assistance in any way. Daw Myo Nwe said the Ministry of Planning was working closely with UNDP on implementation. She explained that the GOB had established a Central Committee on Humanitarian Assistance, chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, with the Minister of Home Affairs, the Minister of Planning, and various line ministries that are partnered with

INGOs. Additionally, the GOB had set up coordination committees at the state, division, district, and township levels to make implementation smoother. Daw Myo Nwe said that when foreign experts needed to travel around the country to monitor humanitarian assistance projects, GOB experts from the appropriate line ministries would travel with them to "look after them."

14. (U) GAO analysts inquired about the differences between the two versions of guidelines the GOB issued: the English language version that was distributed to INGOs, and the more restrictive Burmese language version that appeared later. Daw Myo Nwe said that the only official version, issued to INGOs and the UN, was the English version. She stressed that the English-language version reflected the policy of the GOB and was now officially in effect. However, she admitted that the Burmese version had been issued to GOB officials at the district and township level, together with the English version, to provide local NGO workers and authorities with a "more thorough understanding" of how the English language guidelines should be implemented.

15. (U) Daw Myo Nwe emphasized that Burma welcomed humanitarian assistance with clear objectives. However, she continued, some international humanitarian assistance had a negative impact on Burma. When asked by the GAO team for a specific example, Daw Myo Nwe said that some INGOs wanted to become involved in politics. If INGOs really wanted to help the Burmese people, she said, they would stay out of politics. Daw Myo Nwe noted that she had instructed the UN to write to the Minister of Planning directly should they encounter any problems or issues that needed resolution. She emphasized that the Minister of Planning is the "focal minister" for all humanitarian assistance issues.

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16. (U) Daw Myo Nwe explained that existing GOB agreements with UN agencies remained valid and would be honored, but that the guidelines issued last February were intended for INGOs and NGOs implementing UN programs at the local level. Daw Myo Nwe said that the new regulation requiring that INGOs hire local staff approved by the GOB was designed for INGOs and local NGOs implementing UNDP's Human Development Initiative projects and UNICEF's grassroots projects in townships. She explained that should INGOs and NGOs wish to hire new employees, township authorities would submit a short list of approved candidates to the INGO, who could then conduct interviews together with National Project Director staff and personnel from the line ministry. Final candidates would then need approval by the local coordinating committee.

17. (U) When queried about the GOB's view on the withdrawal of the Global Fund, the Director General of the Department of Health, Dr. Tin Win Maung, said that Global Fund's decision to suddenly terminate its programs in Burma had taken the Ministry of Health by surprise. Tin Win Maung explained that the Ministry of Health had good relations with UNDP. The Global Fund's "zero cash flow" policy ensured that money went directly to the grassroots level and that no money flowed through central government accounts. The assistance would have been distributed directly to the needy areas. The justification given for the Fund's termination, increased travel restrictions, had come as a surprise to MOH, because the Global Fund Secretariat had never directly communicated any such concerns to the GOB. Indeed, Tin Win Maung insisted, the MOH made great efforts to speed up access procedures for Global Fund implementers. Tin Win Maung said that Burma's case should have been handled more like Angola's, explaining that when problems with implementation with the Global Fund were uncovered in Angola, the Fund had suspended assistance rather than terminating it. The Fund's suspension was followed by an audit, corrective measures, and the resumption of Global Fund activities in Angola.

18. (U) Tin Win Maung said the MOH has opened a new office to

facilitate access and travel permission for the new Three Diseases (3D) Fund. Daw Myo Nwe added that implementers who needed expedited permission to travel to sites could contact her and that she would facilitate reviews. Daw Myo Nwe emphasized that, like every other country, Burma has official procedures for implementing humanitarian assistance. If given enough time to carry out these procedures, humanitarian assistance could be implemented in Burma without any complications, she claimed. She claimed that during U/SYG Gambari's visit last May, Gambari personally told the Minister of Planning that he welcomed the new guidelines. Daw Myo Nwe emphasized that every dollar of humanitarian assistance Burma received was used for the country's development in the most effective way possible. She noted that Burma also had an Auditor General's Office, which vigilantly checked how financial assistance to Burma was spent each fiscal year.

¶9. (U) The GAO concluded the discussion by inquiring whether the GOB intended to change the draft guidelines or issue new guidelines. Daw Myo Nwe said that the February guidelines were issued as a result of the first meeting of the Central Committee for Humanitarian Assistance, and that ministers were now preparing for a second meeting. She did not know whether any further instructions would be issued after the meeting.

¶10. (C) Comment: Daw Myo Nwe clearly stated her Ministry's lead on all humanitarian assistance issues. Ministry of Health officials deferred to her throughout this discussion. The GOB's acknowledgment that the new guidelines target the UN's civil society and capacity building activities, such as the UNDP's Human Development Initiative, explains why implementers of health programs have reported fewer problems while INGOs like Australia-based Burnet, which has many civil society building programs, regularly feel the heat of the new guidelines. More troubling is the GOB attempt to control hiring. Our local NGO contacts have come under pressure to

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employ individuals associated with the government's mass mobilization organization, USDA. The UN agencies and INGOs have vowed to resist, but it will be a battle of wills that will inevitably slow the delivery of assistance to those in need, contradicting Daw Myo Nwe's claims of a smoother process. End Comment.
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